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ABSTRACT

Results-based evaluation and assessment of guidance and counseling is a difficult task. How to best evaluate whether the comprehensive guidance program was getting the intended results became an issue for Omaha Public Schools. They set about to draft a framework for measuring student behavior or learning resulting from activities associated with the four major components of comprehensive guidance (guidance curriculum; indirect planning; responsive services; system support). The evaluation framework included process-based, results-based, and data-gathering document components. Counselors from all grade levels were represented on the working committee. District administrators from the Department of Research and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction were also involved. Everyone, including teachers, parents, and students, had some input into the evaluation. Recommendations for pursuing results-based evaluation, as well as lessons learned through this evaluation, are included. (Contains 2 figures and 30 references.) (JDM)

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Chapter Thirteen

Comprehensive Guidance Results-Based Evaluation: *Developing a Practical Approach*

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"Don't report only what school counselors are doing. Report how students are different because of counselors delivering the guidance program." This was the charge of the superintendent to counselors in the Omaha Public Schools in 1987. Today the current superintendent of the Omaha Public Schools, school staff, and the Omaha community ask questions regarding results reporting and guidance plan implementation. Perhaps the questions are reframed, but the current school superintendent and stakeholders in the guidance program are still focused on "results-based evaluation." With greater restrictions on public spending, the need to validate the use of school counselors and ensure the growth of the school guidance program is more apparent than ever before (Gillies, 1993).

While district leaders and others are asking questions about guidance accountability and evaluation, there is a growing interest in guidance as a program rather than simply a service. Services are often ancillary and are more vulnerable during difficult budget decisions. Numerous state departments of education have adopted comprehensive competency-based guidance as the model for delivering a guidance program to all students. Comprehensive competency-based guidance results in a well-defined proactive and reactive program (Starr & Gysbers, 1988).

A Comprehensive Competency-Based Approach to Guidance

Counselors in the Omaha Public Schools realize that an inquiry as to what counselors do provides an opportunity to educate others about their

> school's comprehensive guidance program (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). A well-defined K–12 comprehensive school guidance program consists of four major components (guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support) delivered in three domains (career/occupational, academic/educational, personal/social) to *all* students while the unique needs of individual students are simultaneously addressed (Maliszewski, Pilkington, & Radd, 1994–95).

Comprehensive competency-based guidance is an integral part of the Omaha Public Schools total educational program. The program is organized and implemented by school counselors with the support of teachers, administrators, community agencies, and advisory committees. To this extent, it is indeed a school and community collaborative effort (Maliszewski, Pilkington, & Radd, 1996).

Results-based evaluation and assessment of guidance and counseling have proven to be the most difficult tasks encountered since the district adopted comprehensive guidance (Moore, 1999). Answering the question, "How are students different as a result of the school guidance program?" continues to be a challenge for district counselors. The good news is that progress is being made. Counselors are approaching the challenge with creative K–12 pilot evaluation projects that are getting closer to capturing the results of the comprehensive guidance program.

Determining a Method of Program Evaluation

> The first step toward determining a method of program evaluation and counselor accountability for the district was the organization of a working committee to review research and to identify other school districts that were attempting to conduct results-based evaluation. The supervisor of guidance chaired this committee. The 18 members consisted of counselors from all grade levels, university counselor educators, and district-level administrators representing curriculum and instruction, research, psychological services, and connectivity. A relatively large committee was selected because of the extent of work involved and as a means to garner districtwide support.

Committee members were enthusiastic about the charge and continued to maintain high interest. The agenda for the first meeting consisted of a review of the charge, identification of the purpose of assessment ("to provide school counselors with evidence of their contributions" and "to focus efforts on improving an activity or component of the comprehensive guidance program"). Also discussed was the manner in which the study would proceed.

Learning about Evaluation

A subcommittee was formed to conduct a review of literature related to guidance program evaluation. Another subcommittee was charged with contacting school districts that were attempting to evaluate their guidance programs. These school districts were identified from publications, professional networking, and professional organizations (e.g., the American School Counselor Association and the College Board).

A report outlining the results of the literature review was presented at the second meeting. Among the resources identified as referencing guidance evaluation were 58 journal articles, an ERIC/CASS Special Digest Collection (Schafer, 1995), a special issue on research and evaluation in school counseling published by the American Counseling Association (Gerler, 1990), and a practitioner's guide to evaluating guidance programs (Johnson & Whitfield, 1991). Each resource was examined for practicality of implementation. Committee members came to the consensus that although each publication was well researched and reported, none had a methodology congruent with the culture and common practices of the guidance program in the Omaha Public Schools. Several articles did contribute to determining a direction for evaluation, however (Bloom,1994a, 1994b; Gysbers, Hughey, Starr, & Lapan, 1992; Hughey, Gysbers, & Starr, 1993). Moreover, in recent years, published manuscripts have contained methodology and results that will move our profession closer to determining changes in student behavior and retention of delivered guidance competencies (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1999; Schlossberg, Morris, & Lieberman, 2001; Trevisan & Hubert, 2001; Zinck & Littrell, 2001). Finally, Henderson and Gysbers (1998) offer a concise description and practical application of comprehensive guidance program concepts in selected school districts across the country.

Some school districts were particularly helpful in this study of evaluation and have remained in a networking partnership. School district representatives exchanged information and learned from each other. Members of the network are the departments of school guidance and counseling in Corpus Christi School District, Des Moines Independent Community School District, Mesa Public Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools, and Tucson Unified School District, as well as the Arizona, Missouri, Ohio, and Utah State Departments of Education. All of these school districts have conducted some means of results-based evaluation and are exchanging information with each other. The sharing of materials, procedures, pilot studies, and documented results remains a vital aspect in determining how our profession can conduct practical, results-based evaluation.

Creating a Framework for Evaluation

The literature review and networking with other school districts offered the committee a direction for their work. The committee's next goal was to draft a framework for measuring student behavior or learning resulting from activities associated with each of the four major components of comprehensive guidance. This framework served as a working document allowing everyone to see the direction for evaluation. Figure 1 depicts the framework used to ensure counselors focused on student results, made distinctions in evaluation, and reported documentation.

Figure 1. Framework for Evaluation

Type of Evaluation	
Component	
Process Based	
Results Based	
Data-Gathering Document	
I. Guidance Curriculum	
II. Individual Planning	
III. Response Services	
IV. System Support	
V. Program Audit	

The initial recommendation to address one component each year and conduct pilot approaches to assess student and program results for that component proved to be too ambitious. This was true especially for the intermediate evaluation of student learning associated with delivering the guidance curriculum. It was determined that a minimum of three years, perhaps more, was needed for modifying intermediate evaluation measurements and piloting refinements to the measurement and gathering of documentation (Moore, 1999).

Addressing Process-Based and Results-Based Evaluation

Although results-based evaluation was the primary goal, it was decided that process-based evaluation would also be addressed. The committee hoped that using both forms of evaluation would result in a more comprehensive, and perhaps more practical, means of accountability until more could be learned about how to measure guidance program effects on students. In addition, presenting the distinction between process-based and results-based evaluation was a means of educating counselors relative to the primary focus—changes in student behavior

and learning (Molyneaux, 1999). All Omaha Public Schools had reported conducting some form of process-based evaluation resulting in improvements to the school guidance and counseling programs. These process-based measures included the following:

- completion of teaching and delivery guidance curriculum competencies;
- number of guidance lessons/activities;
- increase in the number of individual counseling sessions;
- completion of a career assessment by all students in each grade level (7–12);
- increase in student participation in college admissions test preparation programs;
- increase in the number of small groups offered and student participation in them;
- increase in the number of parent conferences, individual student conferences, home visits, agency contacts, staff conferences, chemical abuse reports, and staff development in-services/presentations; and
- decrease in clerical responsibilities and time devoted to supervision.

These process-based measures indicated apparent improvements in the guidance program, but a means of evaluating actual results remained the primary target. Results-based evaluation demands constant attention. Several schools piloted intermediate results-based evaluation. A sampling of measurements used thus far to determine effectiveness of the comprehensive guidance program and its effects on students include the following:

- evaluation of students' mastery of specified competencies immediately after a guidance lesson is taught (short-term results);
- benchmark evaluation of guidance curriculum competencies using a sample (15%) of students and two competencies in each domain for each K–12 grade level;
- creation of a written career and advanced education plan for each graduating student;
- decrease in students dropping out and not attending alternative educational programs;
- decrease in suspensions and office referrals in those schools (K–12) that have implemented conflict management programs;
- decrease in the number of students who request schedule changes;
- increase in reports of pre-existing child abuse in schools that have elementary school counselors;
- increase in self-esteem as measured by the Piers-Harris Instrument in elementary schools with counselors;
- student, parent, and staff attitudinal surveys administered in elementary schools showing 96% to 98% positive responses to survey items; and

- increase in SAT I and ACT participation and a slight increase in scores of students who participated in a college admissions test preparation program.

The Missouri Model Audit (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994) was used to verify that the same guidance program was delivered in all schools throughout the district. Recently, an audit developed by the Center for Educational Development and the Arizona counselor leadership cadre offers a concise means of monitoring state standards for comprehensive competency-based programs (Lawhead, 2001). A complete description of the evaluation methods and recommended data-gathering documentation can be found in the *Guide for Comprehensive Guidance Program Evaluation and Documents* (Maliszewski, 1994).

District Involvement and Support

Ensuring that counselors from all grade levels were represented on the working committee proved to be a crucial factor in studying results-based evaluation. However, equally valuable was the involvement of district administrators representing the Department of Research and Department of Curriculum and Instruction. When discussing how to evaluate student learning resulting from the guidance curriculum, the coordinator of curriculum and instruction recommended prioritizing two competencies in each domain (personal/social, career/occupational, and academic/educational) for results-based evaluation at each grade level from K to 12. Advisory committee members, students, parents, counselors, teachers, and administrators all provided input regarding which two domain competencies should be assessed at each grade level. (The curriculum contains more than 100 identified competencies at each grade level.)

Computer technology for gathering data, scanning equipment, and materials were made available through the support and cooperation of the Research Department. Another contribution came from the research director, who suggested that intermediate evaluation of a random sample of 15% of all students receiving guidance instruction should be undertaken to demonstrate retention of learning three to five months after the targeted competencies were taught. Furthermore, it was recommended that 80% be set as the criterion for demonstrating mastery. During the first year of piloting this intermediate evaluation, between 47% and 97% of the students in the various schools demonstrated mastery.

Given the high mobility of students in the district, especially at the elementary level, it became apparent that counselors had to agree on specific months when targeted competencies would be delivered and assessed in all the

schools, so that all students throughout the district would learn the same grade-level competencies within the same time frame. Thus, students who transferred between schools within the district could be included in the sample population (Luther, 2001).

Obstacles to results-based evaluation expressed by counselors included lack of time, inadequate training, lack of support, shortage of resources, and concern about how results would be reported and used (Paisley & Hayes, 1997). District administrative support staff helped to educate counselors about evaluation and supported data gathering efforts. Through a reallocation of resources and a streamlining of other responsibilities, one counselor–project assistant ultimately was given the additional duty of assisting with districtwide guidance evaluation. The project assistant was assigned to work out of the district office but devote the majority of time to schools. The assistant's duties included monitoring the assessment process and gathering and reporting all data. (The framework for gathering data is shown in Figure 2.) Efforts were directed at determining results of the delivery of the guidance curriculum competencies, but other components were also assessed during the year. Although each school had a choice of conducting its own evaluation and forwarding the results rather than being evaluated by the project assistant, most counselors were quite relieved that the evaluation process did not add to their already busy schedules.

Figure 2. Framework for Guiding Assessment of Competencies, Student Results, and Gathering of Data (Luther, 2001).

Targeted Competency Standard
Evidence That Standard Was Met
Method of Collecting Evidence
Person (Evaluator) Responsible
Month
Taught
Month
To Be Evaluated
Percentage of Student Mastery

It was determined that the project evaluator would have access to the reported results, and each school would have access only to its own results. Schools were encouraged to use the results for guidance improvement efforts. Because the comprehensive guidance program is in place in all schools, results were reported as aggregate measures reflecting the districtwide guidance and counseling program. Aggregate results were reported throughout the district and summarized in reports to the board of education. This information fostered the sense of teamwork and enthusiasm of K–12 school counselors throughout the district.

In addition, the school district and community became aware of the progress being made toward a well-defined comprehensive school guidance program. Districtwide support was enhanced by program results and took the forms of positive recognition, authorization for additional counselors, and an increase in financial resources for clerical assistance and materials. Although the evaluation process continues to be refined, district personnel and community members seemed impressed that counselors were attempting to evaluate and demonstrate how their program influenced student learning and behavior.

Two counselors were asked to work during the summer to review reported results from the schools and identify more accurate and efficient ways of assessing targeted competencies and other components of the guidance program. Although tremendously time consuming, revising the assessment methods and clarifying data gathering procedures results in an improved evaluation process each year (Molyneaux, 1999). One issue identified was that for effective results-based evaluation to occur, the guidance curriculum competencies must be first written with evaluation in mind.

Recommendations for Pursuing Results-Based Evaluation

> Arriving at a practical means of conducting results-based evaluation remains a tremendous challenge for school counselors. Isolating variables in order to obtain valid results that reflect the counselors' contributions is an extremely challenging task (Molyneaux, 1999). In addition, the realities and pressures of working in schools make time a limiting factor.

Enlisting the support of university counselor education faculty in addressing problems and providing insights can add much needed research expertise during the planning stages of the evaluation process. In addition, this experience of consulting with school counselors may encourage counselor educators to their counselor trainees teach practical research skills and methods applicable to results-based evaluation of a comprehensive competency-based guidance program (Paisley & Hayes, 1997). In their professional preparation, it is important for school counselors to learn the value of collaborative action research (Pine, 1981). Learning appropriate uses of surveys, qualitative questionnaires, case studies, needs assessments, pre- and post- tests, and program audits is of practical value given the difficulties of conducting research in K–12 schools (Allen, 1992).

Other lessons learned in the transition toward results-based evaluation include these suggestions:

- Prioritize and measure each target competency as objectively as possible.
- Develop forms that will drive the assessment process and guide the

gathering of data.

- Minimize the amount of time that counselors will need to devote to evaluation.
- Develop a school counselor appraisal guide that corresponds with the comprehensive guidance program.
- Join and communicate with other school districts that are attempting to define and report results.
- It is essential to ask who, what, when, and how questions: What is to be evaluated? When is the evaluation to be done? How is the evaluation to be completed? How are data to be tabulated and reported? How can school counselors ensure that they do not feel threatened by the evaluation process? Who is to participate in the evaluation process?
- Keeping counselors, administrators. and advisory committees well informed of the progress being made and the barriers to overcome is essential.
- Equally important are constant reminders of the primary purpose of results-based evaluation: to "provide evidence as to how students are 'different' as a result of school counselors delivering a comprehensive guidance program" (Molyneaux, 1999).
- We encourage guidance supervisors and other administrators to make committee work fun. Without an element of laughter, a good dose of praise for the counselors who are willing to take risks with a pioneering spirit, nourishing refreshments, a convenient meeting time, and the establishment of a sense of teamwork, counselors could easily become discouraged over the difficulty of such monumental work.
- Ultimate responsibility for the comprehensive guidance program and the evolving system for districtwide delivery and evaluation rests with the guidance program leader (Henderson & Gysbers, 1998).

It is not by chance that the Omaha Public Schools have received national recognition for having a well-defined and successful comprehensive competency-based guidance program. Much thought and insight went into developing a comprehensive competency-based program, creative program implementation occurred, and presently efforts to determine the results of delivering the program are underway. As a direct result of collaborations between counselors, administrators, and community members, we demonstrated that a team approach pays dividends for students.

Determining "how students are 'different' as a result of school counselors delivering a comprehensive competency-based guidance program" remains a challenge. However, with each passing year new methodology has been discovered and generated to make our results-based evaluation increasingly practical, valid, and reliable. Evaluation is a perpetual professional process that

requires taking risks, persevering, and finding answers along the journey but benefits students and engenders a pride in our profession.

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